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To Avoid Infringement'

THE VARIOUS military intelligence agencies have received their new marching orders in no uncertain terms from Defense Secretary Harold Brown.

He has told them flatly that their operations should be conducted "strictly within the law" and that he expects them to report "without hesitation" any abuses, improprieties or illegalities that may occur.

It's a sad commentary that events of the past few years have made such an admonition necessary. Brown's order strengthens the hand of the Inspector General for Defense Intelligence and should go a long way toward insuring that the defense secretary won't be forced to spend time, as he put it, "mired in the intelligence nightmares of past administrations."

Brown's dictum is couched in sterner terms than related actions

taken recently by Adm. Stansfield Turner, the new CIA director, and Atty. Gen. Griffin B. Bell.

While Turner has not issued a specific order, he has made it clear to all hands that he expected any abuses, such as improper conduct or mismanagement, to be reported immediately.

Bell has asked FBI agents to inform him what sort of investigative techniques have been used in the past, in order to help him determine whether break-ins and mail openings used by agents to hunt for radical fugitives were unusual activities or common practice.

All of these moves are to be commended. It would be far better, however, if Turner and Bell followed Brown's lead in putting the rules on paper to prevent any possible misunderstanding of what he has in mind "to avoid infringement of the rights of U.S. citizens."